2: Bailey G-5 (ca. 1854) 1863
AX5 Vedda AX5

The
race is rapidly becoming extinct; large families are all but unknown, and longevity is very rare. I have been at some pains to obtain reliable data to elucidate these points. Out of seventy-two Veddahs in Nilgala, fifty were adults, twenty-two children. In one small sept, or family, there were nine adults and one child; in another, one child and eight adults; and so on. In Bintenne, out of three hundred and eight Veddahs, a hundred and seventy-five were adults, a hundred and thirty-three children. Here the disproportion is not so marked; but in one of the smaller tribes, more isolated than the rest, there were twenty adults and but four children.

The paucity of children, I think, must be ascribed to the degeneracy produced by such close intermarriages, for I have never heard a suspicion of infanticide existing among them.* Out of fifty adults in Nilgala, only one appeared to have numbered seventy years, and but eight to have exceeded fifty. In Bintenne, of a hundred and seventy-five adults, two only seemed to have reached their seventieth, and but fourteen to have exceeded their fiftieth years. Such statistics seem to show the practical results of such connections. The Nilgala Veddahs, who still maintain an almost total isolation from other people, are rapidly disappearing.† The Veddahs of Bintenne, who have abandoned the pernicious custom which I have described, and still intermarry among themselves, are becoming extinct, though more gradually.

The Veddahs have no ceremonies at the birth of a child, nor when the name is given; and though, in Bintenne, they have long buried and mourned their dead, those of Nilgala have only commenced, in this generation, to do either.

Till very recently the dead man was left where he died. The survivors covered the body with leaves, put a heavy stone upon its chest, and sought some other cave, leaving that in which the death occurred to the spirit of the deceased. They still desert the scene of the death, and the bones, constantly found in good preservation in the caves of Nilgala, prove how recently the practice of leaving the body unburied has been abandoned.

Tennent says, truly, that they have "no system of caste among

* It certainly was practised among the Kandyans, but never, I think, to any great extent. I have, however, seen two persons who, when infants, were buried alive by their mothers, and rescued.

† Knox speaks, page 68, of Veddahs, "who lived about Hourly, the remotest of the king's dominions," who were "pretty tame," and used "to come and buy and sell among the people," who resented "being pressed to serve the king" in some expedition, and so "removed further into the woods and would be seen no more." "Hourly" is evidently the village of "Oura-oola," on the furthest boundary of the Nilgala district, which, though, as tradition has it, it was once peopled by Veddahs, is now exclusively inhabited by Singhalese.

4:Lewis N-5 (ca. 1906-1918) 1919
AX5 Vedda AX5

houses of lasting character, as neither their instincts nor habits necessitated such procedure. 361

At Kumuna alone we find a modification of these conditions, in that the greater part of the land where the village stood is above flood level, and possessed of constant fresh water all the year round, besides being at a spot where there was a prospect of trade.

It should be added that all the many anicuts on this river between Kumuna and Kebilitte bear silent testimony to the violence of the floods on the river, and to the once existence of a large population, that probably vanished as soon as these engineering works were destroyed—a population who could enjoy the benefit of the river's floodings by diverting the water into immense tanks, that now are but park-like pieces of jungle. 172

The present inhabitants of the region embraced within the boundaries recorded here are unquestionably of mixed origin, as it is easy to trace on the western limits the pure Sinhalese type of feature, these fading again to a more specific type through the Maha Wedirata, and again changing markedly on the north-east of that country, till it is practically replaced by Tamils in the Panawa Pattu. Thus, it would seem that the Vedda type lay between the Uvan Sinhalese on the west and the Tamil on the east, with the result that frequently one would hear men, while asserting that they were pure Sinhalese, conversing with each other in Tamil. This I found to be actually the case at Bowela, where the villagers insisted that they were of the Goigama caste. 101 162

I was completely baffled in my attempts to secure a vocabulary of Vedda words, though I offered liberal payment for a few lessons in that language. I was pointed out men who were able to speak Vedda, and it was arranged that we should meet, in secret, at a definite time, and at a fixed spot, but when the time came I was told the men had gone away to find stray cattle, or some other equally trumped-up story. 197 198

One night I camped close to some huts in the village of Waittegama, and after my lamp had been put out and I was supposed to be asleep, I heard an animated discussion in the nearest hut, but though I could hear every word, I did not

5: Spinel D-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 AX5 Vedda AX5

We had hardly gained the base of the rock when we heard human voices and soon came up with three men and their dogs. One fellow carried a gun, the others had axes hitched to their shoulders. They were on their way to a devil dancing ceremony at a house of illness some miles away; but abandoning their project they accompanied us to their homes.

In a small clearing stood half a dozen leafy shelters. Outside one of these, three women with infants at the breast were seated roasting small yellow flowers. The rest of their people were at work on a *chena** close by. We summoned them and soon we had all the Veddas of the *Kosgaha Ulpotta* before us—some six or eight men and about a dozen women and children. They were a poor lot bearing the stigmata of malaria and framboesia. There was but one old man among them. The children were emaciated and languid.

Most of them showed strong traces of Tamil admixture, especially the women; what poor ornaments they wore, their clothing, and even their very names were Tamil; and so were their predilections if the coy smiles one or two of them bestowed on the fine Tamil that accompanied us signified anything. There were at least three men, however, true to Vedda type—short of stature, wild-eyed, with beardless face and upstanding frizzly hair.

They had no bows among them, except as playthings for the children, but made us one as a memento and stained it with charcoal and *thimbiri* to give it the appearance of use.

The huts were fashioned of wattle and leaves, and thatched with dry grass. Their domestic appointments comprised earthen pots, a wooden pestle and mortar, bark rope, and a deer skin or two.

Fruits, flowers, wild yams, honey, the flesh of animals, *kurrukhan*† and maize formed their food. The meat they fancied most was that of the langur and monitor lizard which they hunted with the lazy mongrels that loitered about. They eat abundantly and at any hour when food is plentiful; but as a rule one good meal a day is all they expect; in times of dearth they bear hunger stoically, chewing incessantly a few varieties of bark they carry in pouches fashioned of cloth saturated with melted wax (*itee vethee*). Partial nomads, they spend many months of the year under trees and in caves. Where the *palu*, *veera*, *kong*, or *mora*‡ fruit is ripe, where the hives are, there they take their women and children, dogs, and chattels and go.

"How often do you bathe?" I asked one of them, the smell of their ring-wormed bodies suggesting little acquaintance with water.

"What bathing for us," he replied. "We fall into a stream once in a way and get out again; that is our bath. And we only do that when our stomachs are full. When we are hungry we don't care for anything; we can eat even a man then!"

In answer to the question how they measured distances and what constituted a mile, the reply was, "We walk till our legs hurt, then we place our axes on the ground, sit down, take out our pouches, and chew a quid; that is our mile".

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*A patch of forest cleared for cultivation

†*Eleusine coracana*

‡*Minusops hexandra*, *Hemicyclia sepiaria*, *Schleichera trijuga*, *Nephelium longana*, respectively.